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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TASHKENT 001171

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SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: CODEL Faleomavaega Meets with GOU Officials

CLASSIFIED BY: Steven Prohaska, Second Secretary, State, Pol-Econ;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: In discussions with Deputy Prime Minister Shaismatov and Foreign Minister Norov on June 29, Congressman Faleomavaega said that the U.S. needs to pay more attention to Central Asia and should approach relations with the governments of the region in a less ideological way. Faleomavaega raised the case of Sanjar Umarov in his meeting with Norov, urging the Government of Uzbekistan to release him on humanitarian grounds. Faleomavaega and Norov also discussed Uzbekistan's foreign and security policies, educational cooperation, and rebuilding bilateral trust. Deputy Prime Minister Shaismatov spoke at length about energy issues, indicating that Uzbekistan will support all pipeline projects that open new markets, including Nabucco. He brought up Uzbekistan's longstanding dispute with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan regarding the use of transboundary waters and urged the United States to observe international standards in this respect. Shaismatov also stressed the importance of restoring peace and stability to Afghanistan through a multi-faceted approach that would include greater employment opportunities for the Afghan population. End summary.

Democracy, the Umarov Case, and Human Rights

¶2. (SBU) Congressman Eni Faleomavaega, Chairman of the Asia, Pacific, and Global Environmental Sub-Committee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, met with Foreign Minister Norov and Deputy Prime Minister Shaismatov on June 29 during a short visit to Uzbekistan. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norov welcomed Faleomavaega, and remarked that it would be preferable for the United States to take a "pragmatic approach" to democracy promotion instead of attempting to forcefully impose democracy on other countries. Norov stated that democratic values should be part of Uzbekistan's mentality, and Uzbekistan has made progress toward its goals since gaining independence, but it should not "destroy the old house before it finishes the new one." Uzbekistan avoided shock therapy and prefers evolution-gradual, step by step change-to revolution. He said that both the United States and Uzbekistan

should put previous misunderstandings behind them and develop cooperation based on mutual trust and respect.

13. (C) Faleomavaega said he strongly supported a pragmatic approach, noting that the U.S. had taken time to develop its own democracy. Nevertheless, human rights would continue to feature on our agenda. He raised the case of political prisoner Sanjar Umarov. Faleomavaega remarked that Umarov's health is apparently failing and noted that he would appreciate President Karimov's assistance in releasing him. Norov responded that Umarov had been convicted for his money laundering crimes, not for his political activities. At the Ambassador's request last year, Uzbekistan had organized a special commission under the Ministry of Health and had also moved Umarov to a prison with better conditions. Faleomavaega explained that he did not want to interfere with Uzbekistan's laws--this was a request based simply on humanitarian reasons. "We never ask the United States to free people based on humanitarian reasons," Norov countered, and pointed out that of every 100,000 people in Uzbekistan, only 130 are in prison. This contrasts with 300 inmates per 100,000 people in Kazakhstan and 700 inmates per 100,000 people in the United States, he continued. Norov also took exception to criticism that other observers have leveled at Uzbekistan on the state of religious freedom in the country. He explained that Uzbekistan values interethnic and religious tolerance; it just opposes proselytism. "The United States lost Karshi-Khanabad Airbase because it was more interested in human rights than in its strategic interests," Norov said revealingly.

TASHKENT 00001171 002 OF 004

Suspicious of Russia, CSTO

14. (SBU) Norov stated that Uzbekistan's interests strictly guide its relations with neighbors such as Russia, China, and Iran. Uzbekistan opposes the idea of the Rapid Reaction Forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). "Why is Kazakhstan supporting it?" Norov asked rhetorically. The Rapid Reaction Forces should not be used in response to any conflicts that take place in the Commonwealth of Independent States, but Russia has not accepted Uzbekistan's position. Norov expressed concern about conditions in Nagorno-Karabakh, Moldova, Georgia, and Crimea and asserted that Uzbekistan cannot participate in military actions there--a position the GOU has expressed to Russia. Norov said that French Afghanistan/Pakistan Representative Pierre Lellouche had praised Uzbekistan as the "Charles de Gaulle" of Central Asia for its independence. "Uzbekistan is trying to prevent Russia from rebuilding the USSR... Russia is trying to control our energy and our water!" Norov noted that Karimov had told Medvedev that Uzbekistan cannot agree with Russia's policy and had accused Russia of trying to dominate the region.

Approach to Afghanistan

15. (SBU) Norov said Uzbekistan appreciates President Obama's new strategy for Afghanistan, but Uzbekistan has its own recommendation. He made another pitch for President Karimov's "6 plus 3" proposal and noted that Uzbekistan opposes the idea of CSTO involvement in Afghanistan. Peace and stability will give Central Asia improved prospects for prosperity, Norov added. He indicated that Uzbekistan supports the stabilization of Afghanistan and that this also supports Uzbekistan's interests, as the men responsible for the May terrorist attacks in Uzbekistan had been trained in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Norov urged the United States to take advantage of Uzbekistan's ability to provide materials and consumer goods in support of international efforts in Afghanistan, and

complained that the Germans at Termez import many goods that they could instead procure locally.

Building Bilateral, Educational Ties

¶6. (SBU) Faleomavaega observed that Central Asia is a very important region and that the United States and Uzbekistan should work to rebuild trust in one another. He hoped President Karimov would visit President Obama in the future. Democracy in the United States is continuing to evolve and is not perfect, and he understood and appreciated that change takes time in Central Asia. Furthermore, sometimes the United States is too quick to pass judgment. Congress is now forming a Central Asia Caucus. Faleomavaega expressed interest in interparliamentary exchanges down the road, and he mentioned a bill in the works to provide scholarships for Central Asian students to study in the United States.

¶7. (SBU) Norov indicated that many Uzbeks are studying abroad and

TASHKENT 00001171 003 OF 004

Uzbekistan notices the difference in them when they return. Uzbekistan is devoting more attention to developing its own schools, in some cases with foreign assistance. He cited Britain's assistance with the opening of a Westminster University affiliate in Tashkent; Singapore's plans to open a business school in Uzbekistan; Russian oil and gas universities; and Italy's plans to open a local branch of Turin University in conjunction with GM's development of a powertrain manufacturing plant in Tashkent.

Uzbekistan Supports Additional Pipelines

¶8. (SBU) At the Cabinet of Ministers, Deputy Prime Minister Shaismatov remarked that Uzbekistan supports Nabucco, and that with additional pipelines, Uzbekistan would have more opportunities to facilitate the export of neighbors' as well as its own natural gas. While this year Uzbekistan is tied to only one major pipeline-to Europe via Russia-he anticipates that Uzbekistan will take advantage of a second line from Turkmenistan through Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan and China in 2010. Shaismatov spoke favorably about the prospects for Uzbekistan to increase export capabilities via three pipelines and predicted that Uzbekistan will export some 40 billion cubic meters of gas per year by 2015. He also expressed support for the Southstream project.

Concerns about Afghanistan, Upstream States

¶9. (SBU) Shaismatov downplayed accounts of regional tension between the Central Asian states, but held that Uzbekistan's problems stem mainly from some of its neighbors. He noted that Uzbekistan began to provide large quantities of electricity to Afghanistan this year and is interested in restoring peace in Afghanistan as soon as possible. Uzbekistan's assistance will make additional jobs possible in Afghanistan and will increase the involvement of the Afghan people in peaceful endeavors, he continued. Developing a plan to employ the Afghan population in business is essential.

Shaismatov complained that an entire generation of Afghans had grown up knowing only war, and that giving them jobs will help to resolve the country's problems. Military means alone are not sufficient. Though Afghanistan's current power consumption is "insignificant," it is developing distribution networks, and Uzbekistan expects to increase the volume of electricity deliveries to Afghanistan in the near future. Uzbekistan favors extending the rail line from Hayraton down to Mazar i-Sharif in Afghanistan. Representatives from Uzbekistan and Afghanistan consult with one another on agriculture and bilateral trade is on the rise. By providing construction materials such as steel, cement, and fertilizer, Uzbekistan can be of additional assistance to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Furthermore, Uzbekistan is interested in helping Afghanistan to exploit the mineral resources located in northern Afghanistan.

110. (SBU) Shaismatov asked the United States to observe international standards regarding the use of transboundary waters. Rational use of this water is an issue with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that remains unresolved, but experts are working on it, Shaismatov continued. Uzbekistan does not object to the construction of hydropower stations in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in principle, but the amount and quality of water being delivered downstream should not drop, and Uzbekistan has made this clear to

TASHKENT 00001171 004 OF 004

its upstream neighbors. "We need to have an international audit done. If an international expert says there will not be a decrease in the amount of water delivered downstream, there will be no problem," he said. Because 65 percent of Uzbekistan's population resides in rural areas-and they derive their income mainly from cotton, wheat, and other agricultural products-a reduced flow of water would be "catastrophic." Shaismatov lamented that the shrinkage of the Aral Sea illustrates previous problems with the distribution of water, and that the resulting salt storms, erosion of land, decrease in agricultural output, and rise of disease has been disastrous-a situation that Uzbekistan is trying to avoid repeating. The Amu and Syr Rivers have been the main source of Uzbekistan's water, but the population has continued to grow. Using the current population growth rate of 1-1.5 percent a year, Shaismatov expected the country's population to double in 50 years, and he asked rhetorically what impact this would have. He recommended that international experts give the issue thought.

111. (SBU) Faleomavaega remarked that he was not here to tell Uzbekistan how to solve its problems with its neighbors, but he did find Uzbekistan's potential to help Afghanistan interesting and opined that the situation with transboundary water is a serious issue. He compared the latter problem with interstate water-related tensions between California, Colorado, and Arizona. Citing an earlier informal dinner discussion with Uzbekistan's Senator Safaev, Faleomavaega described the importance of rebuilding bilateral trust and noted that Congress has plans to support scholarships for Central Asian students to study in the United States. Shaismatov thanked Faleomavaega for the suggestion to forge additional educational links between Uzbekistan and the United States, remarking that Uzbekistan would be glad to have this opportunity, and suggested collaboration with the U.S. Embassy toward this end.

112. (U) CODEL Faleomavaega did not have the opportunity to clear this telegram.
NORLAND